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TAGS: PGOV PREL RU GG

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SECRETARY RICE'S MEETING WITH
GEORGIAN FM VASHADZE

REF: TBILISI 2495

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

OVERVIEW

¶1. (C) New Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze's first visit to the United States will be an auspicious one, featuring the signing of the US-Georgian Charter on Strategic Partnership. The Georgian government is enthusiastic about the content and timing of the Charter, viewing it as a major recommitment of the US to Georgia's sovereignty and security.

Vashadze will likely tell you that this is exactly the kind of message needed in the current international environment. Vashadze will lead a group of Ministers and the Supreme Court Justice to the signing to underscore the seriousness with which the Georgian government plans to implement the agreement.

¶2. (C) Vashadze is looking forward to discussing with you the current challenges facing the country, specifically what is viewed in Tbilisi as the continuing Russian threat. As the main Georgian interlocutor with the Russians for the past year, Vashadze will be able to give you his personal assessment of the current Russian approach. The visit provides us the opportunity to commend the Georgians for their continuing restraint in the face of ongoing provocations from both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Vashadze will likely be interested in discussing the future of international monitoring, in the wake of the recent failure to renew the OSCE mandate for Georgia, and the possible threat to UNOMIG renewal in February.

THE SECURITY SITUATION

¶3. (C) Georgian leaders hope that with the onset of winter, the prospects for renewed Russian violence toward Georgia have declined. Nevertheless, they remain worried that the Russian army or FSB will encourage further attacks or provocations on the boundaries with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. There is particular concern in Tbilisi (and among European Union Monitors and UNOMIG monitors) about the possibility of the Abkhaz/Russians seizing three pieces of still Georgian-occupied land on the north side of the Enguri River, the de facto boundary with Abkhazia. There is also government and public concern that Georgian policemen continue to be killed or seriously wounded in cross-border shootings or attacks by the South Ossetians and Abkhaz, as well as possible Russian snipers. (para 2 Tbilisi 2495)

¶4. (C) Vashadze's visit provides an opportunity to applaud the Georgians' restraint in the face of these continuing provocations from both South Ossetia and Abkhazia into undisputed Georgian territory. You can also draw out Vashadze on Georgian thinking regarding future relations with the territories. President Saakashvili and Vashadze told Matt Bryza three weeks ago that they accept the "carrots and sticks" policy which we suggested be applied toward the territories. The government has not, however, spelled out in any detail its plans for the regions.

GEORGIA WITHOUT THE OSCE AND UNOMIG?

¶5. (C) Georgia has long said that no OSCE mandate was better

than a bad one which would in any way recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, the Georgians would clearly prefer the continuation of any and all international monitors if suitable arrangements can be worked out. They know that now Russia has blocked the renewal of the OSCE mission in Georgia, practical issues must be addressed. They will want the EU to continue its mission, despite the Russian refusal to permit monitors into South Ossetia or Abkhazia. Your meeting with Vashadze will present an opportunity to discuss the future of the UNOMIG mandate. So far the Russians and Abkhaz continue to hang tough in QSo far the Russians and Abkhaz continue to hang tough in their insistence on revising the name of UNOMIG in order to legitimize the government in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Vashadze will likely seek your views on coordinating international pressure on the Russians to permit the continuation of UNOMIG, when the mandate comes up for renewal on February 15, 2009.

GENEVA - WHERE WILL IT LEAD?

¶6. (C) Vashadze and Deputy Foreign Minister Bokeria have been the key Georgian representatives at the Geneva talks. Although they recognize little progress has been made, they see value in keeping the forum going. Ironically, Geneva provides the broader international forum on both territories which the Georgians have been seeking for years. With the next round of Geneva discussions set for mid-February, we suggest you draw out Vashadze on Georgia's expectations for the future. He is well aware that the next round will be in the hands of the incoming Administration, but we believe it is worthwhile to encourage him to be creative in the Georgian approach to the discussion.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AND APP POTI PROPOSAL

¶5. (C) Vashadze can brief you on Georgia's efforts to manage the economic fallout of the war and even more now the international economic crisis. So far Georgia is managing but the international credit crunch is starting to slow business and lead to layoffs. We expect that Vashadze will thank you for the continuing ship visits by the Sixth Fleet (the USS Taylor was in Poti this week). He has also told us he may raise the idea of opening a small US post in Poti (i.e. American Presence Post). While it is clearly in Georgia's interest to have an official American presence near Georgia's major Black Sea port and close to Russian positions in Abkhazia, it also could provide the U.S. with much more direct knowledge of events in western Georgia.

VASHADZE - A DIFFERENT KIND OF FOREIGN MINISTER

¶6. (C) Grigol Vashadze (known as Grigory or Gia to his friends) was appointed Foreign Minister by President Saakashvili on December 10, 2008. Prior to taking up his position, he served as Minister of Culture for approximately one month and as Deputy Foreign Minister for nearly ten months. He had been brought to that position by Saakashvili to help him work with the Russians. Vashadze is different from the other Georgian Foreign Ministers you have worked with. Now 50 he served as a Soviet diplomat earlier in his career and then as a businessman in Russia. He has both Georgian and Russian citizenship. Born in Tbilisi, Vashadze graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1981. He then joined the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while simultaneously receiving a master's degree in international law at the Soviet Diplomatic Academy. During his career at the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Vashadze represented the USSR at chemical weapons negotiations. He was asked to leave the Foreign Ministry in 1987 when -- according to his account -- he took Gorbachev's perestroika too seriously for his superiors. At that time he fell in love with and married Nina Ananiashvili, then already a famous Bolshoi prima ballerina. Vashadze helped manage her career and developed business interests in Moscow and then in

New York, when Ananiashvili became the first Soviet dancer to appear as a guest performer at the New York City Ballet in 1988. She subsequently became a principal dancer for the American Ballet Theater in 1993 and in 1999 joined the Houston Ballet. Vashadze returned to Georgia with his wife, when she was appointed Artistic Director of the Georgian Ballet in September 2004. Ananiashvili is also the godmother to President Saakashvili's youngest son, Nikoloz.

TEFFT